



HACKERS' WARS

How the FBI, Pentagon, NATO and technologists staged the Arab Spring
and resulting coups and wars

Or, How I Learned to Worry and Stop Loving the Arab Spring:
an argument in favor of cyber realism

— Introduction —

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May 2001

Wargame *UV '01* simulates US war in landlocked Central Asia prompted by Islamic terror attack

Sept. 11, 2001

Wargames scheduled morning of 9/11 simulate plane hijackings, NORAD unable to respond in scenario

Sept. - Oct. 2001

Gen. Clark learns Rumsfeld's orders to 'take out' Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Somalia, Sudan, Iran; US invades Afghanistan

July - Aug. 2002

Wargame *MC '02* simulates removal of Middle East regime with weapons of mass destruction

Mar. 2003

US invades Iraq on premise it has weapons of mass destruction

Jan. 2007

US begins bombing Al-Shabab in Somalia

2008 - 2011

Facebook, Google, MTV & US NGOs begin training Arab protesters in social media protest methods

Nov. 2008

National Intel. Council report predicts emergence of coronavirus pandemic by 2025 will kill hundreds of millions worldwide

2009

Iran election protests coordinate via social media; Electronic Frontier Foundation crowd sources US hacking of Iranian social media accounts, hackers use Iranian proxies to join Iranian social media protests

Late 2000s

Ret. Army officer witnesses RAND Corp. plans to flood Arab social media with 'democracy' & 'revolution' tags

Mid- 2010

Google Exec. Wael Ghonim creates "We Are All Khalid Said" Facebook page & gains large Egyptian following

Dec. 2010

Anonymous given IRC #InternetFeds, chat focuses on revolution in Middle East
FBI uses Anonymous asset to start chat on Occupy Wall Street movement

Dec. 9, 2010

Anonymous IRCs & bot armies disappear after plans to hack Amazon.com

Jan. 2011

Anonymous reconnects Arab Spring protesters' Internet after gov'ts shut it down, stages Occupy Wall Street protests; Arab Spring protests break out coordinated via social media; Google Exec. Ghonim publicly attends Egyptian protests

Jan. 14, 2011

Tunisian revolution coordinated via social media leads to President Ben Ali's resignation

Feb. 2011

Egyptian revolution coordinated via social media leads to President Mubarak's resignation; Revolution via social media breaks out in Libya

Mar. 2011

NATO invades Libya; US backs rebels as Syrian War begins

July 8-9, 2011

UN peacekeepers enter southern Sudan one day before the Sudan partitions into South Sudan and Sudan

Oct., Dec. 2011

UN & NATO-backed Libyan forces capture and kill Gaddafi; US withdraws from Iraq

2012 - 2013

Former CIA officer and NSA contractor Snowden gives classified files to journalist Glen Greenwald

Mar. 2013

Saudi prince Salman bin Sultan & NSA direct Syrian rebels to 'flatten' Damascus

July 4, 2014

US 1st bombs ISIS camp in Syria attempting to find hostaged US journalists & NGO worker

Mid- 2014

ISIS gains large social media recruiting presence in the West via social media and declares “Caliphate”

Oct. 24, 2017

Glen Greenwald & media outlet *The Intercept* reveal four year-old ‘Snowden file’ that warned of Saudi & US-led destruction of Damascus

Dec. 2018 – Apr. 11, 2019

Revolution in Sudan coordinated via social media leads to President al-Bashir’s resignation, Bashir goes on trial at ICC for crimes against humanity

Oct. 2019

The Gates Foundation, Johns Hopkins University, and The World Economic Forum stage *Event 201*, a tabletop exercise simulating severe pandemic

Oct. 17 - 29, 2019

Revolution in Lebanon coordinated via social media leads to Prime Minister Hariri’s resignation

Mar. 2020

The World Health Organization declares Coronavirus-19 a global pandemic

Aug. 2020

Prime Minister Hassan Diab and entire Lebanese gov’t resign following Beirut explosion & protests

Jan. 2021

US election protests coordinated via social media lead to storming of US Capitol building and 2nd impeachment of President Donald Trump

June 2021

Coronavirus-19 death toll reaches 3 million worldwide

Introduction

As an academic subject, the American Empire is largely taboo.

Chalmers Johnson

This paper begins with many honest premises. First and foremost, that the Arab Spring protests have ended in violence and the deaths of numerous protesters, followed by state coups, the 'failure' of states, wars, sex slavery and human trafficking, refugee migrations, genocides and major destabilization of the entire Middle East and beyond. Therefore, this paper does not hesitate to frame any and all discussion of the Arab Spring protests of 2011 in those terms. Further, it makes the argument that the FBI, Pentagon, NATO, and technologists of various US industries including media are responsible for these premeditated tragedies.

This paper is not a history or chronology of the Arab Spring. This is a paper about *how* the Arab Spring happened, and therefore it features much more analysis and theory than history lessons. As a result, my findings may be much more broadly applied.

I analyze the processes that created revolution, war, and genocide in the age of the cyberarms race and Web 2.0. I focus on the intersection between information technology and US foreign policy in the Middle East as an information science professional and Middle East studies expert. This is in no way a look at 'what went wrong' in the celebrated Arab Spring movement, and where my opinion is expressed, it is intolerant of the exclusion of the results of the Arab Spring. This work responds to the analytic pivot points identified by the Brookings Institution's defense analysis staff in their 1978 seminal book *Force Without War* analyzing fifty years of so-called small wars. The principle analytic points considered are:

- (1) U.S. objectives,
- (2) the instruments of policy directed at those objectives,
- (3) the character of the situation (and particularly the concerns of foreign decisionmakers), and (4) most important, the outcomes of the situation.¹

This analysis is a laying out of facts as they occurred with, first, knowledge of US military and intelligence transgressions in the Middle East, and second, a basic understanding of technology in modern war.

Analysis will show that the events which have unfolded before and since 2011 display a high level of strategic and tactical coordination between government and industry professionals to the end seen today. Theoretically, this analysis is a work of realism and therefore it "assume[s] unitary governmental decision-making with a high degree of control over implementation and access to near-perfect information." This unitary decision-making has driven the "popular passions, operational instruments, and political objectives" of war, as identified by Carl von Clausewitz in *On War*. This coordination created the monopolies of violence that were needed to bring about both the idealism of the Arab Spring and the devastation that would result.

As Magdalena Karolak writes in *The Social Media Wars*, the government is "simultaneously target, sponsor, and antagonist for social movements as well as the organizer of the political system and the arbiter of victory."²

¹ Blechman, Barry M. and Stephen S. Kaplan. *Force Without War: U.S. Armed Forces as a Political Instrument*. The Brookings Institution. 1978, p. 19.

² Karolak, Magdalena. *The Social Media Wars: Sunni and Shia Identity Conflicts in the Age of the Web 2.0 and the Arab Spring*. Academica Press. 2014, p. 13.

Hackers' wars are irregular warfare information operations³ incorporating electronic warfare operations⁴ conducted by a state which deliberately involve populations to effect war, coup, or other conditions of life calculated to bring about physical destruction. These operations are typically carried out as wargames before or simultaneously with the execution of the real-world operation. The most salient features of hackers' wars are propaganda efforts, surveillance, cyberespionage and hacking, electronic weaponry deployment, and, importantly, the misattribution of these cyber coercion and deterrence techniques. The role of cyberweaponry is most saliently concealed in hackers' wars because information operations, as "U.S. policy suggests[,] these types of operations fall below the threshold of armed conflict," and are therefore not "considered an armed attack under international law" or "an act of war".⁵ In short, **hackers' wars are the wars brought about by hackers.** In the case of the Arab Spring, the hackers' wars began thusly:

The regime responded by disrupting the flow of information, hacking e-mail and Facebook accounts, but the social revolution inside Tunisia and the solidarity movement outside Tunisia, had already a strong momentum. The Anonymous group hacked Tunisian government websites and assisted Tunisians to parry Internet censorship.

In less than a month of social unrest dictator Ben Ali chose to leave the country. The combination of social media (Facebook) in the beginning of the events was critical in reaching not only millions of Tunisians, but also the local and global traditional media (Al-Jazeera). The protests in Egypt followed the successful one in Tunisia.

The oppressive and corrupt regime of Mubarak forced thousands of Egyptians to organize massive social protests. The protesters demanded Mubarak's resignation and the reinstitution of democracy. Social media was used not only to spread the message, but also to share online content like online maps and encryption techniques. The Egyptian police monitored social networks, email accounts of dissidents as well as Skype and arrested dissidents that were responsible for coordinating the protests. In late January 2011, the regime, in a desperate move to control the information flow, decided to cut off access to Internet for a few days. Despite such restrictions, the movement had reached a critical mass and support, both inside and outside the country.

In technical terms, Egyptians were able to employ alternative connection routes or import satellite phones. Likewise, news channels like Al-Jazeera succeeded in reaching Egyptians by transmitting via alternative satellites. Furthermore Google and Twitter released a new social media tool Speak2Tweet, that allowed Egyptians to use their mobile phones, to call a number and leave a voicemail, which would then be 'tweeted' on the Twitter website. In common with Tunisia, social and traditional media were closely linked and gradually even state-controlled media supported the protesters.⁶

³ From Congressional Research Service *Defense Primer: Information Operations*: While there is currently no official U.S. government (USG) definition of information warfare (IW), practitioners typically conceptualize it as a strategy for the use and management of information to pursue a competitive advantage, including both offensive and defensive operations... which include computer network attack, computer network defense, and computer network exploitation; psychological operations (PSYOP); electronic warfare (EW); operations security (OPSEC); and military deception (MILDEC).

⁴ From Congressional Research Service *Defense Primer: Electronic Warfare*: Electronic warfare (EW), as defined by the Department of Defense (DOD), are military activities that use electromagnetic energy to control the electromagnetic spectrum ("the spectrum") and attack an enemy... Applications include radio frequencies to communicate with friendly forces; microwaves for tactical data-links, radars, and satellite communications; infrared for intelligence and to target enemies; and lasers across the entire spectrum to communicate, transmit data, and potentially destroy a target.

⁵ Theohary, Catherine A. *Defense Primer: Information Operations*. Congressional Research Service. 14 January 2020, p. 2.

⁶ Liaropoulos, Andrew. "The Challenges of Social Media Intelligence for the Intelligence Community". *Journal of Mediterranean and Balkan Intelligence*, No. 1, Vol. 1. 2013, p. 9-10.

Compare the above cyber realist account to the account of initial Arab Spring events given by UN Security Council translator and researcher M.E. McMillan:

Take Syria, for example. What began with a group of teenage schoolboys scribbling graffiti in Deraa calling for the overthrow of the dictator in Damascus has escalated into a catastrophic civil war with consequences far beyond Syria. Syria started off fighting one war – the people versus the unelected president – and is now fighting more than half a dozen. Damascus, the city that once ruled the Arab world, has become the stage for just about every power struggle in the region. Democracy versus dictatorship. Sunni versus Shi'i (which really means Saudi Arabia versus Iran). Militants versus moderates. The sacred versus the secular. Arab versus Arab (which really means Saudi Arabia versus Qatar). Even East versus West, as old and supposedly forgotten Cold War rivalries resurface with a new, twenty-first-century twist. Then, to complicate things further, militants started fighting each other. And their fighting did not stop with them. The rise of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL – rebranded as the Islamic State in the summer of 2014) pulled yet another group into the vortex of violence: the Kurds. Without a state of their own, the Kurds are caught in the crossfire of other people's wars. When ISIL attacked Kurdish villages on Syria's norther border and in Iraq, the Kurds fought back and a whole new front opened up. ISIL, for their part, extended their reach beyond the battlefields of the Middle East. Lone wolf attacks and assassinations of soft targets in Western cities – attacks that are deliberately designed to draw a Western military response – opened up yet another front in this seemingly endless war.⁷

Simply put, I argue that the Arab Spring was war profiteering and pre-existing policy enacted via social engineering. Although I will not make the comparison throughout, this perspective is also informed by now-declassified US social subversive actions taken throughout the 1950s to 1980s in Latin America. And while the Middle East is now the most war-torn area of the world, Latin American regions and cities remain by far the most dangerous and violent places in the world since those decades due to the effects of narco-terrorism, with up to 45 out of 50 of the world's highest homicide rates being found in Latin American cities. These are allegedly non-conflict zones that have not experienced declared invasion by the US. While similar US actions occurred in the Middle East decades ago as well, decades ago the Middle East was much farther away logistically from North America than it is today.

There are many similarities that can be explored between Latin American narco-terrorism and jihadi terrorism: their emergences with US policy change and their functions as US policy counterpoints; their self-perpetuating problematics; and their portrayals as culturally natural and inevitable. I address the changing representations of terrorism through policy operations to give an aggregate sense of what engineered events like the Arab Spring have had compoundedly, globally.

Air Force Officer Zachary Martin describes the nature of actorless threats, which are not truly actorless, in his Air Force Press publication "The Hydra: the strategic paradox of human security in Mexico":

The high level of violence and the paramilitary capabilities of some cartels draw easy comparisons with modern irregular warfare. Some of the violence enacted by cartels displays a level of anomie that bears resemblance to terrorist tactics. Anomic violence relates to purposeless and gruesome acts of aggression in complete contravention of societal norms and values... The cartels create regional instability that foreign competitors can leverage to gain access to the Western hemisphere. The human security threat draws the attention of nearly every international and nongovernmental entity in the world... The

⁷ McMillan, M.E. *From the First World War to the Arab Spring: what's really going on in the Middle East?* Palgrave MacMillan: NY. 2016, p. 1-2.

enemy is made up of organizations exploiting this shortfall... The organizations exploiting the lack of human security are known by many names: violent drug trafficking organizations, transnational criminal organizations, narcos, insurgents, cartels, and criminals. The human security threat that cartels propagate resembles the mythological Hydra: immortal, multiheaded, regenerative, and poisonous. States cannot wage war, as traditionally conceived, against such a threat.⁸

Despite the reality of such human security threats, this analysis will conclude that the vast majority of the crises taking place across the world are intentionally perpetrated by policymakers and others in intel-security industries, evidenced through scenario-based policymaking. Take for example the 2008 “scenario” from the National Intelligence Council on actorless terrorism:

Although this transfer is not zero-sum, early losers such as most of Latin America (with the exception of Brazil and a few others) and Africa are receiving neither a stake in the initial asset transfer nor any significant inbound investment from the recipient countries... Parts of Latin America will continue to be among the world’s most violent areas. Drug trafficking organizations, sustained in part by increased local drug consumption, transnational criminal cartels, and local crime rings and gangs, will continue to undermine public security. These factors, and persistent weaknesses in the rule of law, will mean that a few small countries, especially in Central America and the Caribbean, will verge on becoming failed states.⁹

The pan-Arab identity underlying the Arab Spring¹⁰ is the reason I prefer to deal with all the Arab countries involved in the Arab Spring at once, or, individually as part of a whole. It is more reflective of the political philosophy from which it was born. Despite much of the activity online occurring in English, and despite ensuing wars and elections favoring the more current pan-Islamist political philosophy, the belief was that the Arab Spring signaled a return to pan-Arabism by the Arab youth. This is a philosophical contradiction and a structural indicator that the Arab Spring was staged.

I believe there is not much sense in tracking identity movements in the Arab World. Islamism is clearly on the rise as shown in increased homogeneity in the Middle East caused by war, persecutions, kidnapping and trafficking, genocides of religious and ethnic minorities, and partitions along such lines created by intervening countries. Pan-Arabism or Arab nationalism is likely not on the rise since a large number of Arab nations have been dismantled by wars and coups and their populations scattered since 2011.

The role of US foreign policy, the role of American popular and commercial participation before, during, and after the Arab Spring is the ‘identity movement’ I am interested in tracking. Through details I will discuss about the identities expressed through the technologies involved, I will show that the introduction of technology into a long-standing Orientalist trend has enabled new generations and larger numbers of Westerners to represent and intervene in the East for Easterners.

I also show that social media companies were able to conduct social engineering by committing *technical* engineering operations, all of which combined to allow super-states to conduct literal proxy wars via proxied technology. This aspect of hackers’ wars is addressed in the sections titled Social Engineering and Proxy Wars and ‘Going Native’.

In addition to the effects of the Arab Spring that I directly address, a likely increase in drug growing and trafficking would be a point for further research in the region. Not only have there been ample reports

⁸ Martin, Zachary. *The Hydra: the strategic paradox of human security in Mexico*. Wright Flyer Paper No. 78. Air University Press. 2020, p. 6; 33; 2.

⁹ National Intelligence Council. *Global Trends 2025: A Transformed World*. U.S. Government Printing Office. November 2008, p. 7, 15.

¹⁰ Karolak, Magdalena. *Social Media Wars: Sunni and Shia Identity Conflicts in the Age of the Web 2.0 and the Arab Spring*. Academica Press. 2014.

of US military involvement in opium trafficking in Afghanistan, for example, but the analogy can be made between the Middle East interventions and indirect subversions in Latin America under the guise of a war on drugs or terrorism, both of which actually have the effect of increasing violence, drug use, and regional instability.

Douglas Lute, White House's Afghan War Czar from 2007 to 2013 has been quoted as saying on the phenomenon of actorless threat terrorism:

We stated that our goal is to establish a 'flourishing market economy. I thought we should have specified a flourishing drug trade — this is the only part of the market that's working.' From the beginning, Washington never really figured out how to incorporate a war on drugs into its war against al-Qaeda. By 2006, U.S. officials feared that narco-traffickers had become stronger than the Afghan government and that money from the drug trade was powering the insurgency. No single agency or country was in charge of the Afghan drug strategy for the entirety of the war, so the State Department, the DEA, the U.S. military, NATO allies and the Afghan government butted heads constantly.¹¹

That the ongoing nature of these criminal conspiracies necessitate a complicity of silence from international media and expert commentators on relevant topics - to continue the example, not connecting the emergence of the Opium Crisis in the US in 2002 with the 2001 US invasion of Afghanistan, the world's leading exporter of opium (the same strategy employed by the British against China during the Anglo-Afghan Wars of the 19th century) suggests that there is more at stake for the leisure class that makes up international media in the truth of the matter than maintaining a job with disposable income. To encourage this point of inquiry, I will include some facts here that will indicate a broader connection between these seemingly unrelated industry members as pertains to drug trafficking and terrorism, especially so-called actorless threat terrorism.

It is in fact impossible now to research or write on the topic of modern wars and genocides by technology without technologists finding out before the project has even left the research phase. This aspect of cyber realism and war - that technology corporations have a high level of state-sanctioned end-to-end control of war weaponry operations, information access, and public opinion - is important to deal with because it is the context in which *any* information will be gathered and presented to a broader audience which can be used to prove or prevent the extinction of entire peoples and nations.

The media's role as the public-facing side of the political and technologic industries is addressed under the same argument for cyber realism in the section Monopoly on Violence, Monopoly on Infringement. The media's long-time habit of conducting their investigations by use of war crime technologies and their dependence on reporting on human suffering to make revenue and gain political leverage, known as the CNN effect, has created an extremely corrupt and biased situation in which modern media operate. Adversarial journalism cannot exist when journalists are in the same money-making industries as the Pentagon. Moreover, a Free Press, and the protection those individuals are granted in the Constitution to do their work, does not exist to provide immunity for intel-security agents conducting information operations against civilians. This topic is addressed in the section Horseshoes and Hand Grenades.

¹¹ Whitlock, Craig. "At War With The Truth". *The Washington Post*. 9 December 2019.

HACKERS' WARS

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Abstract

Timeline

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2011 in 20/20

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'Total' Speculative Fiction

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Monopoly on Infringement

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